



Department of Consumer Protection

Fact Sheet: Order and Review Your Free Credit Reports

Since September 1, 2005, all consumers in the United States can get free copies of their credit report each year. The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) now requires each of the nationwide consumer reporting companies — Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion — to provide you with a free copy of your credit report, at your request, once every 12 months.

Your credit report includes information on where you live, how you pay your bills, and whether you've been sued, arrested, or filed for bankruptcy. Nationwide consumer reporting companies sell the information in your report to creditors, insurers, employers, and other businesses that use it to evaluate your applications for credit, insurance, employment, or renting a home.

Why do I want a copy of my credit report? Your credit report has information that affects whether you can get a loan — and how much you will have to pay to borrow money. You want a copy of your credit report to:

- make sure the information is accurate, complete, and up-to-date before you apply for a loan for a major purchase like a house or car, buy insurance, or apply for a job.
- help guard against identity theft. That's when someone uses your personal information — like your name, your Social Security number, or your credit card number — to commit fraud. Identity thieves may use your information to open a new credit card account in your name. Then, when they don't pay the bills, the delinquent account is reported on **your** credit report. Information like that could affect your ability to get credit, insurance, or even a job.

Who else can get a copy of my credit report?

Creditors, insurers, and other businesses that use the information in your report to evaluate your applications for credit, insurance, employment, or renting a home are among

those that can legally access your report. Your current or prospective employer can get a copy of your credit report, but only if you agree in writing.

What is a credit score? A credit score is a three-digit number generally ranging from 300 to 850. A higher credit score, identifies you are as a better credit risk to lenders. Generally a score of 700 or more is considered a good credit score.

How do I order my free credit reports? The three nationwide consumer reporting companies (Experian, TransUnion and Equifax) have a central website, a toll-free telephone number, and a mailing address through which you can order your free annual report.

To order on the internet, go to www.annualcreditreport.com. By phone, call 1-877-322-8228. To order your report by mail, complete an Annual Credit Report Request Form and mail it to: Annual Credit Report Request Service, P.O. Box 105281, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281. The Form is attached to this fact sheet; or you can print it from www.ftc.gov/credit.

Do not contact the three consumer reporting companies individually. They are providing free annual credit reports only through the means outlined above.

Should I request the free credit report from all three companies each year? Yes. Because all three consumer companies get their information from different sources, the information in your report from one company may not be the same in your reports from the other two companies. That's not to say that the information in any of your reports is necessarily inaccurate; just different.

Should I order all three reports at the same time?

You may order one, two, or all three reports at the same time, or you may stagger your requests throughout the year.

How secure is the information I provide when I request my free reports? For your online requests, the information you provide on the request form is encrypted before it is sent to the consumer credit reporting company and is decrypted only upon receipt by the company. Physical, electronic and procedural safeguards designed to guard your personally identifiable information are also in place.

A warning about imposter sites... If you order your credit reports online, to be sure to correctly spell www.annualcreditreport.com. Better yet, link to it from the FTC's website to avoid being misdirected. Some imposter sites use terms like "free report" in their names; others have website addresses that purposely misspell annualcreditreport.com in the hope that you will mistype the name of the official site. Some of these "imposter" sites direct you to other sites that try to sell you something or collect your personal information. While you may be offered additional products or services while on the authorized website, you are not required to buy anything to receive your free annual credit reports.

Do not reply to emails, letters or phone calls claiming to be a provider of the annual credit report program. If you get such an email, see a pop-up ad, or get a phone call from someone claiming to be from annualcreditreport.com or any of the three nationwide consumer reporting companies, do not reply or click on any link in the message. It's a scam.

How long does it take to get my report? If you request your report online, you should be able to see and print it out immediately. If you order your report by calling 1-877-322-8228, your report will be processed and mailed to you within 15 days. If you order your report by mail using the Annual Credit Report Request Form, your request will be processed and mailed to you within 15 days of receipt.

What if I find errors or incomplete information in my credit report? Write to the consumer reporting agency (Equifax, Experian, or TransUnion) and describe what information you think is inaccurate.

The consumer reporting company must investigate the items in question – usually within 30 days – unless they consider your dispute frivolous. They also must forward all the relevant data you provide about the inaccuracy to the organization that provided the information.

That information provider must investigate, review the relevant information, and report the results back to the consumer reporting company. If the information provider finds the disputed information is inaccurate, it must notify all three nationwide consumer reporting companies so they can correct the information in your file.

The reporting company must give you written results and a free copy of your report if the dispute results in a change. (This report does not count as your annual free report.) The company cannot put the disputed information back in your file unless the information provider verifies that it is accurate and complete. If you still disagree with the findings, you can ask that a statement of the dispute be included in your file and in future reports.

How long can a consumer reporting company report negative information? Most accurate information can be reported for seven years; bankruptcy information for 10 years. There is no time limit on information about criminal convictions; information reported in response to your application for a job that pays more than \$75,000 a year; and information reported because you've applied for more than \$150,000 worth of credit or life insurance. Information about a lawsuit or an unpaid judgment against you can be reported for seven years or until the statute of limitations runs out, whichever is longer.

What about companies that claim they can improve my credit report for a fee? Beware of companies that offer credit repair. These companies, commonly called credit clinics, don't do anything for you that you cannot do for yourself at little or no cost. Avoid any organization that offers to create a new identity and credit file for you. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) TC and state attorneys general have filed actions against those who pursue these fraudulent practices.

For a helpful brochure about credit clinics, write to the Federal Trade Commission, Sixth and Pennsylvania Avenues, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20004 and request a brochure titled "Credit Repair: Self Help May Be Best."

Other information about Credit Reporting is available on the FTC website at www.ftc.gov.